

BLIND CAMPERS

Campbell, C.

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Splash! Splash! Splash! Screams of delight announce the rushing of the blind children down the beach into the shallow water as the Red Cross Life Saver blows the whistle announcing the swimming period at the Red Cross Safety Camp at Ore Lake, Michigan.

From the edge of the water to the first rope the depth is scarcely knee high and fully twenty-five yards from the shore. Upon reaching this first rope, the blind children once more await the signal before climbing over the rope into the area which is completely protected. The depth here is not much over the waist and no one who is not a good swimmer is allowed to go outside the enclosed area.

Swimming and diving is one of the best sports for the blind, just as it is for those who see. It not only exercises a maximum of the muscles of the body, but a blind person is scarcely handicapped in the water. In answer to the question -- "How do they know when they are approaching a fellow-swimmer?" it should be remembered that most people in the water make a noise and that announces their position to the blind person. Diving and life-saving are just as practical for the blind as for those who see, and there is no sport which is more heartily enjoyed by the blind than swimming. The swimming periods are the peaks of the day for those at camp, be they blind or sighted.

This year, for the first time, a summer camp was conducted for a group of twenty blind children in Detroit. The Lions Club, the Junior League and the Red Cross cooperated in the undertaking, and those who visited the camp were delighted to see what a happy time the youngsters were having. Their program was as methodical and as well filled as those at any well regulated camp, and those in charge of the young people



stated that they had never had a group of children who were more responsive to the directions of the counsellors. (5)

After breakfast the children helped to clear the dishes and then went to their tents and tidied them. The morning inspection was one of the liveliest events of the day and great was the anxiety as to whether Willie's or Mary's tent might be chosen as the prize winner for the day.

Two of the most popular games were "House A-fire" and "Ball". In the first two lines are formed and a series of objects are passed as rapidly as possible along each line and then returned to the beginner. The line which can do this most rapidly wins. Sometimes objects as different as a bucket, a nail, golf ball, brick bat, etc. are passed. At other times a series of wooden blocks serves the purpose, but the excitement always runs high and it must be admitted that it is often a matter of split seconds to decide which side wins.

In the ball game a semi-circle is formed and the leader throws the ball, eighteen inches in diameter, so that it strikes the ground about six feet in front of the blind player. It is thrown so that when it bounces it will rise to the height of the shoulders of the person to whom it is thrown. The name of the one who is to catch the ball is called when the ball is thrown. The sound, when it strikes the ground in front of the player, is all that is needed to prepare the catcher to receive it. When a player misses, he or she sits down. Of course the last one left standing wins.

The hike, especially where there is to be a "wienie" picnic, or indeed, any kind of a "feed" en route, is fascinating. It should be remembered that the number of totally blind is small. In any group of so-called blind people, there are always some who have a little vision. That is to say, they can see shadows, sometimes they can see objects close at hand. In other words, that amount of vision, small as it is, will enable such a

person to act as guide for a totally blind child who is going on a hike. (3) The counsellor who has the party in charge takes the hand of one of the totally blind children and leads the way, and then, two by two, the group will follow. Sometimes a group of sighted children, who may be neighboring campers, will join the party and then every blind child is able to have a guide with full vision. In this way a hike through the thickest woods, over the roughest places, even mountains, is perfectly practical and a most enjoyable event.

Blind people always talk of "seeing" things, just as we do. In reality, of course, that means they see an object when they have the opportunity of examining it with their hands. Perhaps one of the most joyous features of the camp program is a docile pony. Not only does every blind child want to have a ride, but they want to "see" the pony, in other words, feel it. How logical was the little blind girl, who had never seen a horse at close range, when she asked "What kind of shoe laces does the horse use?" In the same way a lamb, a pig, a rabbit, any animal, in fact, that is to be found in the country is a never-ending source of delight to the blind children who often have never seen such things. One little boy, who blinded himself with a nut pick when trying to unfasten his shoe lace, was thrilled when he was allowed to put his hand under a hen in a trap nest. With the greatest glee he cried, "That's the first time I have ever seen eggs under a hen".

In the evening, songs, accompanied by blind players with piano or accordion, dances, stories around a camp fire, followed by a marshmallow roast, are so popular that if sighted people suddenly come upon the blind campers they rarely appreciate that the little people are living in a world of darkness.

If a camping experience means joy to those who have vision, it means even more to those without. Perhaps nothing can give better evidence of

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this than the incident of the little boy, who was observed going from tree to tree just before he was to leave camp, saying "Good-bye" to the trees.

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